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SB 116 ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION ACT

1. Doctors are often wrong when they predict how long a patient has to live. Grim prognoses are often wrong. Examples abound of patients still alive years after they were told they had 4 to 6 months to live. I have a physician friend who was given maximum 18 months to live after breast cancer metastasized to her lungs. That was 13 years ago, and she is alive and well. I have seen many cases where specialists were wrong in predicting expected lifespan. Statistical analysis, with probability of dying within a certain period of time, is based on data compiled from patients with similar illnesses. The lifespan of countless individuals exceed their statistical probability. If assisted suicide becomes legal, there will be Montanans who kill themselves who could have had many quality years and some a normal lifespan.

2. Elder abuse is real and will proliferate with legalized suicide— In the more than 20 years I have been a physician, I have witnessed greed in the battle for my patient's inheritance, including vicious battles over wills at their death bed. I have seen many cases of my most vulnerable patients taken advantage of for financial gain. Often it is family members, but not always. Within the last year, I have been involved in three cases where the perpetrators are from outside the family. One obtained financial control (became payee for social security and retirement benefits) by taking advantage of an elderly woman's loneliness and dementia. He feigned romantic interest in her, flattering her to the point she is taking his side against her family members. Adult Protective Services was eventually able to provide a guardian, but by then thousands of dollars were taken from her. This same motive of greed could lead to coerced assisted suicide if there was anticipated financial gain, and death could occur quickly if assisted suicide was legal --before protection could be put in place.

Elder abuse is already a huge problem in Montana, so is suicide. I urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 116 and protect the vulnerable in our society.